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UNCLAS BUENOS AIRES 000062

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SENSITIVE

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STATE FOR DS/DSS, DS/DSS/IP, DS/IP/WHA, DS/IP/OPO, DS/IP/ITA,  
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POSTS FOR RSO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [AR](#)

SUBJECT: ANNUAL OVERSEAS SECURITY ADVISORY COUNCIL (OSAC) CRIME AND  
SAFETY REPORT

REF: 07 SECSTATE 168473

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

11. (SBU) OVERALL CRIME AND SAFETY:

Traffic accidents are still the primary threat to life and limb in Argentina, especially in Buenos Aires. Pedestrians should be vigilant when crossing streets and remember to look both directions, even if the street is designated one way. Traffic laws are routinely not obeyed and vehicles often travel at excessive speeds. Recently published statistics in [www.perfil.com](#) and [www.luchemos.org.ar](#) report that over 8000 deaths occurred in Argentina in 2007 due to traffic accidents, more than 500 more victims than in 2006 (22 deaths per day).

Crime is a serious problem in Argentina, but one that can be managed with common sense precautions. Street crime has become common and increasingly more violent, and often is perpetrated with a firearm. The head of the Argentine Interior Security Commission and media sources ([www.inecip.org](#) and [www.parlamentario.com](#)) indicate that there are anywhere between 800,000 to 2 million unregistered weapons in Argentina.

While criminal activity is a common problem and on the rise, it is concentrated in urban areas, especially Greater Buenos Aires, Cordoba, Rosario, and Mendoza. The wealthier parts of metro Buenos Aires experience high rates of property crime, with high-income neighborhoods often registering twice as many complaints as some of the poorer and supposedly more dangerous parts of town.

In the countryside, there have been a few tourists robbed in isolated areas and occasional burglaries of hotel rooms in resort areas. Mendoza has been the site of two commando-style robberies at up-scale vineyards in the last four months. Highway robbery largely affects commercial vehicles and hijacking of inter-city buses is uncommon.

Urban crime includes: pick pocketing/purse snatching, scams, mugging, express kidnapping, residential burglary, home invasion, thefts from vehicles (smash and grab), sexual assaults/rape, car theft and carjacking. Short-term visitors to urban areas are subject to all types of street crime, but report few problems with public transportation or with four and five star hotels.

Thieves specifically target expensive jewelry and watches, especially high-value items such as Rolexes. Long-term residents are subject to the full range of criminal activity on the street while driving, traveling, and at home.

Express kidnapping (short duration/low ransom) continues along with conventional mugging. Extortion kidnapping for ransom has so far only affected well-off Argentines. The true rate of kidnapping is unknown, but considerably lower than in Brazil or Colombia. Virtual kidnapping, a telephone scam in which the caller claims to have kidnapped someone who is simply not at home, continues to be a regular occurrence. Such calls often come from jails and the callers ask for prepaid phone cards, which are a form of money inside prisons.

Many criminals are armed and ready to use their weapons at the first sign of resistance. Policemen are frequently killed in Buenos Aires and close to 100 police officers were murdered or seriously wounded in Argentina during 2006. Crimes occur at all hours and armed robberies often take place during business hours. Favorite targets for armed robberies are banks and businesses dealing in cash or high-value merchandise. Apartment invasions and burglaries are common, and occasionally entire buildings are taken hostage. Criminals regularly go through neighborhoods and apartment buildings ringing doorbells and robbing those who open the door.

Argentina is still considered a transit country for drugs, but local consumption is increasing. Media reports cite the growing use of cocaine and other derivatives by middle-class youths.

## 12. (SBU) POLITICAL VIOLENCE:

There are weekly demonstrations in Greater Buenos Aires and frequent demonstrations in other major cities. Most protests are related to domestic economic and political issues including labor disputes. U.S. interests are occasionally targeted based on current events, such as the recent coverage of the Antonini Wilson case in Miami, the Iraq war, economic policy, or policy toward Cuba. The largest and most disruptive protests are usually sponsored by the "piqueteros" (a collection of "social activist" groups whose main tactic is to block roads). In Buenos Aires, demonstrations most commonly occur downtown and often end up at the Plaza de Mayo, Casa Rosada, Congress, or the monument on 9 de Julio. Protesters generally come from labor unions, unemployed/underemployed/landless movements, student groups, and the political left. While most protests are peaceful, there are "hooligan" elements that periodically show up to fight the police and/or engage in vandalism. The police are generally restrained unless attacked by hooligans. In addition to the organized demonstrations, there are occasional, spontaneous protests by groups of displaced workers, unemployed persons, unpaid pensioners, people upset by electricity cuts, etc.

Despite the negative perception of various USG policies, Argentines are relatively friendly to Americans, and visitors are unlikely to experience any anti-American sentiment.

Pipe bombs or incendiary attacks are occasionally used during the more violent demonstrations. Targets over the last year have included bank branches, municipal or public utility offices, McDonald's restaurants, and Blockbuster Video stores.

There is no known operational terrorist activity in Argentina, but the recently issued Argentine arrest warrants implicating Hezbollah and former Iranian leaders in the 1994 AMIA bombing continue to generate considerable interest. Care should be exercised when traveling in Brazil and Paraguay, near the Argentine border. These organizations are involved in the trafficking of illicit goods, and some individuals in the area have been disgusted by the U.S. Treasury Department for financially supporting terrorist organizations.

## 13. (SBU) POST-SPECIFIC CONCERNS:

Argentina experiences occasional flooding along the coast, including parts of Buenos Aires, and in low-lying parts of the interior, such as Santa Fe Province. Western/northwestern provinces, such as

Mendoza, Salta, Jujuy, and Tucuman periodically have earthquakes.

Road conditions are good, but traffic is fast throughout the country and heavy in the big cities. Drivers are very aggressive and oblivious to lane designations and other traffic laws. As addressed earlier, the accident rate involving pedestrians is very high.

#### 14. (U) POLICE RESPONSE:

Expatriates can generally expect better police response and less harassment than in many other Latin American countries. Individuals detained by the police should ask to contact the Embassy or consulate. In Buenos Aires, the tourist Police assists many tourists with language services to file police reports.

Checkpoints are common, especially around Buenos Aires, and drivers must have all documentation, including passport or Argentine ID card, driving license, vehicle registration and proof of third-party liability insurance. If a police officer asks for a bribe, immediately report this occurrence to the Embassy.

#### 15. (U) POLICE EMERGENCY NUMBERS:

CAPITAL FEDERAL POLICE: 9-1-1 or 4383-1111 through 1119

Prefectura (Coast Guard): 4318-7558 o 4318-7400 int. 2011 Av Macacha Guemes 150

Tourist Police: 4346-5748 Corrientes 436, Capital  
turista@policiafederal.gov.ar

Fire: 100 or 4951-2222, 4381-2222, 4383-2222

BUENOS AIRES PROVINCIAL POLICE (suburbs): 9-1-1

#### 16. (U). MEDICAL EMERGENCIES:

CAPITAL FEDERAL (City of Buenos Aires):

SAME: 107 or 4923-1051/9  
(Municipal Emergency Medical Service)

HOSPITAL	ADDRESS	PHONE
Hospital Fernandez	Cervino 3356	4808-2600
Hospital Aleman	Pueyrredon 1640	4821-1700
Sanatorio Trinidad	Cervino 4720	4127-5555

BUENOS AIRES PROVINCE (suburbs):

HOSPITAL	ADDRESS	PHONE
San Isidro	JJ Diaz 818, San Isidro	4512-3700
San Lucas	Belgrano 369, San Isidro	4732-8888
Sanatorio Trinidad	Fleming 590, San Isidro	4793-6766

#### 17. (U) SECURITY TIPS:

CARRY CASH: 100-200 US\$ or 300-400 pesos. Criminals in Argentina frequently resort to violence if they perceive a victim is being uncooperative or if the target does not have anything worth stealing. The people most likely to be attacked or beaten are those without any money. If confronted, offer no resistance and immediately hand over everything demanded.

DO NOT WEAR ROLEXES, or other flashy or expensive jewelry that draws attention. Women should safeguard their purses while walking and when eating in restaurants or cafes.

Criminals are often well-dressed and crime can occur anytime during the day at any location. Use common sense and remain vigilant. Travel in groups when possible. Always stay in well lit, populated areas and avoid parks after dark.

Be alert to pick pocketing in tourist and shopping areas. Do not flash large amounts of cash, or carry expensive looking bags, briefcases, or laptop cases in public.

Do not carry all of your important documents in your wallet or purse. Carry a photocopy of your passport.

Use ATM machines located in public places like the hotel, shopping mall, or event venue. If the booth has a door, make sure it closes behind you.

If you are in a restaurant or other business that gets robbed, follow the instructions of the robbers and hand over valuables on demand.

**MUSTARD ON THE BACK SCAM:** Unknown to you, a liquid is squirted on your back. After a few steps, someone, often a middle-aged woman, will inform you that you have something on your back and offer to help clean it off. Meanwhile, she or an accomplice picks your pockets. This scam has been used regularly in tourist areas such as San Telmo, La Boca, 9 de Julio, Recoleta, and Florida Street. Fortunately, this is one of the least confrontational crimes; just say "NO" and walk away.

Pay with exact change as much as possible. If you pay for a small item with a large bill, you risk being shortchanged or getting counterfeit in change. Only take pesos as change.

Use credit cards only at the hotel and major stores and restaurants. Watch your bills carefully for fraudulent charges.

#### 18. (U) TRANSPORTATION

Remises (hired car and driver) are the best public transportation. They charge by the kilometer and are reasonably priced. Hotels, many restaurants, and shopping centers can call one from an established service.

Radio taxis are the next best choice. Taxis are black and yellow in the Capital, and white with blue lettering in the Provinces.

Avoid black and yellow taxis with the word MANDATARIA on the door.

These taxis are rented on a daily or hourly basis and are often involved in criminal acts.

Do not take rides offered by people on the street or outside an airport.

The following is in order of preference is recommended: a) Call for a remise or taxi, b) take one from an established stand, c) hail one on the street (but not in front of a bank).

USE the seatbelts, lock the doors, and keep windows up. Do not place your purse or other valuables on the seats in plain view from the outside or unattended.

Subways, buses, and trains are safe but watch out for pickpockets and be ready for work stoppages.

Watch your bags at airports, bus, and ship terminals.

#### 19. (U) DEMONSTRATIONS

Demonstrations are a frequent occurrence in Buenos Aires and other large cities and towns.

In Buenos Aires, demonstrations often occur in the downtown plazas, and near commercial and government buildings. Roadblocks (pickets) on major roads leading into the larger cities are also common.

Protests range in size from dozens to thousands of participants.

Most protests are peaceful, but may be loud due to sound systems, drums, and fireworks. The burning of effigies and flags is routine.

There are hooligan groups that will sometimes infiltrate protests in order to fight the police and engage in vandalism.

At soccer games, sit in the expensive seats and do not wear the colors of, or cheer for, the visiting team.

#### 110. (U) FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Buenos Aires OSAC formally meets every quarter. The Washington, DC based OSAC Regional Coordinator for WHA or the Regional Security Office at American Embassy Buenos Aires can provide more information.

AMERICAN EMBASSY: (54)(11) 5777-4533  
Regional Security Office 5777-4298  
Marine Post 1 (24 hrs) 5777-4873

WAYNE